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Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Computers in Human Behavior

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/comphumbeh

Full length article

Personality and espoused cultural differences in technostress creators



Satish Krishnan

Information Technology and Systems Area, Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode, IIMK Campus (P.O.), Kunnamangalam, Kozhikode 673570, Kerala, India

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 June 2016

Received in revised form

21 September 2016

Accepted 22 September 2016

Keywords:

Technostress creators

Personality

Espoused culture

Online survey

India

ABSTRACT

This study examines the individual differences in ‘technostress creators’—defined as the factors that cause technostress for employees. Drawing on the Five-Factor model of personality and Hofstede’s cultural values framework, this study proposes that the Big-Five personality traits and the espoused cultural values explain variation in technostress creators beyond the traditional antecedent measures of age, gender, education, and computer confidence. Further, in line with the insights from extant behavioral studies on “personality–culture” interaction, this study posits that the Big-Five personality traits can be linked to technostress creators more closely when each of them is accompanied by the espoused cultural value of long-term orientation than when without it. Analyzing data from an online survey of 322 full-time employees in India, results indicated that (1) the personality traits of agreeableness, neuroticism and openness to experience, and the espoused cultural values of masculinity and power distance are the key predictors of technostress creators; and (2) the relationships of agreeableness, conscientiousness and extraversion with technostress creators are contingent on espoused long-term orientation. Findings of this study contribute to the knowledge base of technostress by understanding the linkages of (and among) personality and culture with technostress creators.

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1. Introduction

The rapid proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in organizations has resulted in significant benefits for its employees in terms of their performance, satisfaction, productivity and effectiveness (DeLone & McLean, 1993, 2003; Petter, DeLone, & McLean, 2008). At the same time, both academic and practitioner communities highlight that in addition to these benefits; ICTs also present potential drawbacks as well. Technostress, a term coined in 1984 by clinical psychologist Craig Brod (Ayyagari, Grover, & Purvis, 2011), is a modern disease caused by one’s inability to cope or deal with ICTs in a healthy manner (Brod, 1984), which can be a destructive force for employees; and hence for their organizations. To illustrate, a report from Pew Research Center highlights that though ICTs offer increased connectivity and flexibility, they also add stress and new demands to employees’ lives (Madden & Jones, 2008). Another study indicates that ICTs affect employees’ work and emotions as personal resources such as energy and attention are required in dealing with them (Lim & Chen, 2012; Macklem, 2006). Indeed, technostress is linked to

reduced job satisfaction, commitment, innovation and productivity (Tarafdar, Tu, Ragu-Nathan, & Ragu-Nathan, 2011).

Drawing on the extant literature on technostress, Srivastava and his associates highlight that technostress is caused in employees “because of the increased work overload, excessive technology dependence, demands for enhanced productivity and a constant need to adapt to emerging ICT applications, functionalities and workflows” (Srivastava, Chandra, & Shirish, 2015, p. 356), which together is termed as *technostress creators* (Tarafdar, Ragu-Nathan, Ragu-Nathan, & Tu, 2007). While studies indicate that these creators having implications for employees vary across individuals (Tarafdar et al., 2007), there are only a handful of research examining such differences. For instance, a study by Ragu-Nathan and his affiliates tested the effects of four traditional antecedent measures namely, age, gender, education, and computer confidence on technostress, and found that males experienced more technostress than females, and that technostress decreased with increase in age, education and computer confidence (Ragu-Nathan, Tarafdar, Ragu-Nathan, & Tu, 2008). However, these traditional measures are only surface-level traits, and to our knowledge, extant studies have not accounted for the effects of deep-level traits such as personality and espoused culture that are often associated with a number of organizational processes, behaviors and outcomes (Barrick &

E-mail addresses: satishk@iimk.ac.in, iamsatishk@gmail.com.

Mount, 1991; Birnbaum & Sommers, 1986; Bono & Judge, 2004; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983). Hence, against this backdrop, we believe that it is vital to understand the personality and espoused cultural differences in relation to technostress creators. We argue that individuals, depending on their personality traits and espoused cultural values, will perceive technostress creators either as having negative consequences or as providing opportunities for them to engage in and learn new things at workplace. Accordingly, the key research question (RQ) of this study is as follows:

RQ: How are personality and espoused culture related to technostress creators?

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, by drawing on the Five-Factor model (FFM) of personality and Hofstede's cultural values framework, we explain the linkages of (and among) personality and espoused culture with technostress creators. This is followed by the section on research design. Thereafter, using data from an online survey of 322 full-time employees in India, we test our hypotheses. We then discuss the results and the implications for future research. The final section provides concluding remarks with a restatement of the value of our study.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

Tarafdar et al. (2007) identified five factors that create technostress for employees: (1) techno-complexity; (2) techno-insecurity; (3) techno-invasion; (4) techno-overload; and (5) techno-uncertainty. While *techno-complexity* describe situations where the complex computer systems used at work force people to spend time and effort learning and understanding how to use new applications and updating their skills, *techno-insecurity* is associated with situations where people feel threatened about losing their jobs to other people who have a better understanding of new gadgets and computing devices. Whereas *techno-invasion* denotes being 'always exposed' so that people can potentially be reached anywhere and anytime and feel the need to be constantly connected, *techno-overload* describe situations where the use of new technologies force people to work more and faster. And, *techno-uncertainty* relate to the short life-cycles of computer systems because of which people do not get the chance to experience a particular system. Table 1 summarize the sample situations that cause technostress to employees.

The central premise of this study is that technostress varies across individuals, and such variations become evident when the linkages of deep-level traits such as personality and espoused culture with technostress creators are accounted for. In the ensuing sections, by drawing on the personality and espoused culture literature, we describe how different individuals perceive technostress creators differently.

2.1. Relating personality to technostress creators

Personality refers to an individual's personal set of mental programs that need not be shared with any other individuals (Everton, Mastrangelo, & Jolton, 2005; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). It is a stable set of characteristics that determine individuals' commonalities and differences in thoughts, feelings and actions (Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtzman, & Gaddis, 2011; Maddi, 1989). A key model that is central to personality and work behavior research is the Five-Factor model (Goldberg, 1992; John & Srivastava, 1999; McCrae & Costa, 1999) in which the essence of one's personality is comprehensively represented by five traits, labeled as the Big-Five: (1) agreeableness; (2) conscientiousness; (3) extraversion; (4) neuroticism; and (5) openness to experience.

Table 2 provides a brief description on each of these traits.

Although some studies have argued for a framework consisting of less than five factors (e.g., Block, 1995; Eysenck, 1992), it is the FFM that has gained a lot of attention amongst researchers across different disciplines such as organizational science (e.g., Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001) and information systems (e.g., Devaraj, Easley, & Crant, 2008; Krishnan, 2016). As noted by Briggs (1992), the FFM model of personality is "... the model of choice for the researcher wanting to represent the domain of personality variables broadly and systematically" (p.254). Hence, we believe that FFM would present a concise theoretical framework for studying individuals' personality related differences in technostress creators.

In this study, we propose that individuals with different personality traits are likely to perceive technostress creators differently. For instance, as agreeable individuals score high on characteristics such as likeability, friendly compliance and social adaptability, they will be more accommodating when asked to use organizational ICTs (Devaraj et al., 2008). And, because of their communal orientation (Zellars & Perrewé, 2001), they tend to perceive technostress creators positively; as such creators are more likely to change their work habits to adapt them to new technologies. Further, studies indicate that agreeable individuals tend to use new ICTs in their job even without having the required capability (Srivastava et al., 2015). Hence, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1a: Individuals scoring high on agreeableness will perceive technostress creators positively.

Conscientiousness is the tendency to be goal-oriented with a strong sense of purpose (Venkatesh, Sykes, & Venkatraman, 2014). Individuals who are conscientious are characterized by will to achieve, conformity and prudence (Witt, 2002). Although conscientiousness can act as a psychological resource that protects an individual from experiencing stress (Zellars, Perrewé, Hochwarter, & Anderson, 2006), it is likely that conscientious individuals at work tend to perceive technostress creators negatively as they might feel that such creators are more likely to negatively impact their qualities of planning and persistence (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Further, as new developments and constant changes in organizational ICTs are likely to affect their characteristics of responsibility and impulse control (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010); they will comprehend technostress creators negatively. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1b: Individuals scoring high on conscientiousness will perceive technostress creators negatively.

Extraversion is called by alternative labels such as confident self-expression, sociability and surgency (Witt, 2002). As individuals scoring high on extraversion experience greater positive affect in response to positive stimuli (Gomez, Cooper, & Gomez, 2000; Gross, Sutton, & Ketelaar, 1998), it is more likely for them to perceive technostress creators as the negative stimuli impacting their emotions negatively. Further, as extroverted individuals are characterized by energy and positive emotions, work-related ICTs and its frequent changes are more likely to make them feel the need to update their skills constantly to avoid being replaced. Also, studies indicate that extroverts in comparison with their counterparts prefer face-to-face interaction than interactions via organizational ICT tools (Hamburger & Ben-Artizi, 2000; Landers & Lounsbury, 2006). So, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1c: Individuals scoring high on extraversion will perceive technostress creators negatively.

Neuroticism, known by its positive pole of emotional stability,

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